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THE PANIC OF 1862 IN WISCONSIN

M. M. QUAlFE

That masses of human beings are subject, no less than the lower animals, to sudden outbursts of wild, unreasoning panic and hysteria is a matter of common knowledge. In civil life such outbursts may vary widely in form, depending upon the nature of the occasion which has evoked them—from the wild yet harmless gust of anger which swept over the country upon receipt of the news that Admiral Dewey had given to his wife a house presented to him as the result of popular subscription, to the more frequent causeless stampede from a theater or other place of assemblage, with its toll of life and limb. In military life such hysteria more commonly assumes the form of panic rout upon the occurrence of some unexpected event supposedly favorable to the opposite cause. So well recognized is this liability to sudden panic that a prime purpose of military drill and discipline is to eliminate the likelihood of its occurrence by reducing the individuals who compose the army to automata who move only at the command of a superior.

However causeless and foolish a given panic in the light of after knowledge may appear to be, but little reflection is required to show that certain causative conditions are common to all outbursts of this character. Briefly stated, each individual is concerned for his own welfare, and because of a predisposing train of events the public mind has become imbued with the idea that this welfare is seriously endangered; then the report is started, under circumstances which do not admit of individual investigation, that the danger feared is at hand. The report may be false and the danger wholly nonexistent; yet the individual lacks the means of determining this and—wisely, often-times, in view of his state of information—seeks safety in

sudden flight. His fear is heightened by the spectacle of those around him acting in like fashion, and for the time being he is deprived of his ordinary faculty of guiding his actions in the light of reasoned judgment. After the event the action taken may seem ridiculous enough; yet it is better to be a live object of ridicule than a dead object of pity. A few years ago a crowd of Sunday strollers went out upon the too-thin ice of a flooded Chicago lagoon. Suddenly the ice began to sink and a wild dash was made for the bank. All reached it in safety, with no greater damage than a large number of wet feet. Here the stampede was amply justified, and the crowd took the only wise course of running first and investigating afterwards. Can it be said that the wisdom of the action taken would have been less, had it been in response to a false alarm? If so, what shall be said of the wisdom of those who, refusing to credit the startling report of the rider who dashed down the Conemaugh Valley in advance of the Johnstown flood, neglected to make instant flight to the hills? Clearly, to paraphrase slightly the old verse,

He who promptly flees away
May live to investigate another day.

Probably the most notable panic in the annals of Wisconsin was the great—and wholly causeless—Indian scare of 1862. So far as we know, no comprehensive study of this incident in our history has ever been made. We propose to examine it, therefore, with the twofold object in view of putting on record a narrative of the event itself, and of drawing such conclusions from it as the facts adduced may seem to justify.

For modern peoples, at least, war is an abnormal state of affairs and the public mind is keyed up to an abnormal state of excitement, viewing with indifference, or even with positive approval, actions which in normal times would meet with severest reprehension. In Wisconsin in the

autumn of 1862 the public mind was ripe for a siege of hysteria. For over a year the armies of the Union had been engaged in deadly grapple with a foe whose success would destroy the life of the nation; and thus far there seemed but little reason for expecting that the foe would not succeed. Already the "three-months' war" had dragged out to five times this length, and the Union armies had but little of positive achievement to their credit. In the West, it is true, some successes had been won, but the Army of the Potomac, which was to our Civil War what the Western Front was to the Allies in the World War, had in the hands of incompetent leaders encountered one bloody reverse after another, until, instead of Richmond being in Union hands, the late summer of 1862 witnessed the army of Lee and Jackson again in the immediate vicinity of Washington.

In Wisconsin conditions reflected faithfully the gloomy state of national affairs. Already the frontier state with a meager population of eight hundred thousand had sent thirty thousand of her young men to the front. The country newspapers carried weekly long and ever-growing lists of casualties. Volunteering had fallen off to such an extent that already recourse to conscription had become necessary. In the lake-shore counties, where a large German and Belgian element lived, serious draft riots had developed. In Milwaukee order had been preserved only by bringing in large numbers of troops. The popular and respected chief executive of the state, Governor Harvey, had recently lost his life in a sorrowful accident—drowned in the Tennessee River while engaged on an errand of mercy to Wisconsin's sick and wounded soldiers after the battle of Shiloh. To a public thus sated with anxiety was suddenly borne the news of the terrible Sioux Indian massacre in Minnesota, one of the the bloodiest in all the long story of conflict between the white race and the red. Although the people of Wisconsin were safe enough from Indian

massacre, the public nerve suddenly broke, and a wave of senseless panic swept over the state.

Even a brief glance at the Indian population of Wisconsin suffices to show that with the possible exception of the extreme northern and western portions of the state the whites stood in no conceivable danger from this source. The most powerful tribe was the Chippewa of Lake Superior; it numbered—counting only those living in Wisconsin—about forty-five hundred souls. By virtue of the treaty of La Pointe of 1854 it occupied four reservations: one of 66,000 acres in Marathon County, another of the same size in Chippewa County, a third of 125,000 acres in Ashland County, and a fourth of 25,000 acres in La Pointe County. However, the tribe did not restrict itself to these reservations but wandered freely over much of the northern part of the state, picking berries and hunting and trapping.

Next in strength to the Chippewa were the Menominee, who from time immemorial had resided in the vicinity of Green Bay. They had a reservation of 230,400 acres along the banks of Wolf River in Shawano County and according to the annual reports of their Indian agent were making creditable progress toward a state of agricultural self-sufficiency. Aside from this, they carried on logging operations, hunted, trapped and fished, gathered berries, and manufactured maple sugar for sale to the whites. They numbered in 1862 about eighteen hundred souls.¹

In Brown and Outagamie counties, not far removed from the Menominee, was the reservation of the Oneida, comprising 61,000 acres. These were the most powerful of the "New York Indians" who had come to Wisconsin some forty years before, numbering a little over one thousand persons. The Stockbridge and Munsee, on a reserve of two sterile townships, completed the tale of the Indians

¹ Much detailed information about the several tribes attached to the Green Bay Agency may be had in the annual reports of Agent Davis, which are printed with the reports of the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

attached to the Green Bay agency. In 1862 the agent reported 135 persons on the Stockbridge reservation and 214 members of the tribe who were scattered over the north-western section of the state. These New York Indians were much further advanced in civilization than any of the native Wisconsin tribes; and it seems apparent from the contemporary reports that to the extent their hard economic conditions and the interference of rascally white men permitted they were industrious, law-abiding citizens.²

Besides these several tribes with legal habitations there were in the state about one thousand or twelve hundred wandering Indians, chiefly Potawatomi and Winnebago, who had managed to remain behind when these tribes were removed from Wisconsin, or else had returned to the state of their individual initiative after their removal to reservations farther west.³ They had no settled homes, but moved about from place to place⁴ and subsisted by hunting and fishing and begging from the whites. They had no supervision by the general government until in 1864 Congress provided for a special agent with headquarters at Stevens Point to look after them.

Altogether there were thus about nine thousand Indians in Wisconsin, of whom nearly eight thousand were attached to government agencies; a considerable proportion of them were far advanced in civilization and practically all were loyal to the government and desirous only of living in peace with their white neighbors. There were various causes

² The proximity of the Oneida to De Pere and Green Bay and the hostile attitude of the local courts made it impossible to prevent the debauching of these Indians by crooked liquor dealers. As illustrative of the attitude of the courts, Judge Miller pointedly complained that cases against illicit liquor sellers were brought before him, and lamented the expense and inconvenience caused the accused thereby. In one case the district attorney had presented his proofs in such convincing fashion that it seemed the jury could not avoid a verdict of guilty, when Judge Miller, in his charge, observed that the prosecution *had not proved the defendants knew the men they sold to were Indians*, and another verdict of acquittal was returned.

³ In 1865 these wanderers were reported to number 1,500, but of these 350 were Potawatomi who had come in from Kansas during the preceding year.

⁴ One such band which we shall shortly have occasion to notice was encamped for several years during the war on Horicon Lake in Dodge County.

of friction between the two races; but it seems clear from the official reports and even from the statements of local white residents that the great bulk of such misconduct as the red men indulged in was induced by prior wrongdoing on the part of the whites. Their record for loyalty in the Civil War was one to put many a white community to shame. An alien race, and induced by no fear of conscription, they furnished a surprising number of volunteers to the several Wisconsin regiments. The Menominee, with a total population of 1,879, sent 125 soldiers into the army, and of these one-third died either of disease or on the field of battle.⁵ The Oneida, less than 1,100 in number, furnished 111 soldiers; while the Stockbridge and Munsee supplied forty-three soldiers from a total population of 338.

No report was made of the number of soldiers supplied by the other Wisconsin tribes, but the correspondence of the governor's office affords interesting evidence of the attitude of the Chippewa.⁶ Three days after the surrender of Fort Sumter, M. M. Samuel of St. Croix Falls, a fur trader of twenty years' standing among the Chippewa, wrote to Governor Randall that he had five hundred Chippewa braves at his command, whose services he offered "to aid the cause of the Union in arms against Treason."⁷ Elaborating upon this offer, in response to a request from the Governor for more detailed information, Samuel explained that by reason of his long residence among the Chippewa he had acquired a thorough understanding of their "peculiar habits, manners, and views," and an influence commensurate with any enterprise he might propose to carry out. The one proposed would accomplish the twofold result of supplying the government with five hundred soldiers and benefiting the frontier by the removal from it of a body of warriors

⁵ Report of Green Bay Agency in *Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs* for 1865.

⁶ Now preserved in the State Historical Library.

⁷ M. M. Samuel to Governor Randall, April 17, 1861, ms. in governor's Civil War correspondence.

of this size.⁸ Concerning Samuel's proposal Augustus Gaylord, his fellow-townsmen, and later adjutant general of the state, wrote the governor expressing his belief in the trader's good faith and in his ability to carry out his plan.⁹ Gaylord raised a doubt, however, concerning the propriety of employing Indians "in the present contest with our brothers." About the same time Robert Grignon was tendering the Governor two hundred Menominee warriors, "all well armed with rifles, sure at forty rods."¹⁰ Eventually, however, no Indian military units were accepted by the authorities, and the red men who became soldiers entered the service by individually joining one or other of the white regiments which were being raised. In the absence of official data it is impossible to say how many Wisconsin Indians joined the army. Since the tribes attached to the Green Bay agency, with a total population of about thirty-three hundred, supplied two hundred seventy-six men for the army, it seems conservative to assume that the whole nine thousand Indians in the state furnished five hundred or six hundred soldiers. Whatever the precise number may have been, it is amply evident that the vast majority of the warriors in Wisconsin were friendly to the whites and loyal to the government.

Had the case been otherwise, however, the red men could have accomplished little against the whites and for them to have taken the warpath would have been sheer insanity. The bands were widely scattered over a vast extent of country; the several tribes had little in common with each other; they were all poverty-stricken and quite lacking in resources for carrying on a war; at the best, they numbered nine thousand people in the midst of a white population of eight hundred thousand. It may be

⁸ Samuel to Randall, May 14, 1861, ms. in governor's Civil War correspondence.

⁹ Letters of Gaylord to Randall, April 24, 1861, and to W. H. Watson, May 16, 1861, in governor's Civil War correspondence.

¹⁰ Letter to Governor Randall, May 8, 1861, in governor's Civil War correspondence.

granted, of course, that there was some excuse for anxiety on the part of the sparse white population of northwestern Wisconsin; but when the scare came it moved with transports of terror the inhabitants of populous counties and towns who were in no conceivable danger, extending even to the metropolis of the state itself.

A curious foreshadowing of the great panic of 1862 was had exactly a year before in the Indian scare at Horicon.¹¹ Early on the morning of Monday, August 26, 1861, a breathless messenger came to the village with the information that fourteen houses had been burned by the Indians at Kekoskee and some of the inhabitants had been murdered. It was also reported that eight hundred warriors were on their way to Horicon to burn and pillage the town. The news spread rapidly through the village, and the streets were soon thronged by excited townsmen. Crowds of women stood crying on one corner while the men congregated on another to discuss what should be done, and the children, dismissed from school, ran wailing through the streets. Wagonloads of farmers came in from the surrounding country, and an effort was made to arm the men, but only a motley array of firearms "with here and there a bludgeon and pitchfork" could be produced. So great was the alarm that many families made hasty preparations to leave for Milwaukee and some actually started. Meanwhile a telegram was sent to that city for state troops to come to the rescue of the beleaguered village, and a large company of men from Hustisford marched to Horicon to bear a share in the defense of that place.

Shortly after noon several wagonloads of men who had gone to Kekoskee to reconnoiter returned with the report that all was quiet at that place. They had found only twenty-five or thirty Indians around the encampments there, thoroughly frightened at the appearance of so many

¹¹ The data for the description which follows are drawn from the *Horicon Gazette*, Aug. 28, 1861.

armed men among them. But this report did not suffice to allay the terror of the panic-stricken townsmen of Horicon. The small number of Indians seen was regarded by many as a highly suspicious circumstance, and it was surmised that their enemies were lying concealed in the woods waiting the approach of darkness before beginning their work of destruction. At a public gathering in the afternoon a committee of fifteen was appointed to make a second investigation of the situation and discover, if possible, the cause of the alarm.

This committee journeyed to the Indian camp the same afternoon and the next morning proceeded with their investigation. They found that the camp contained twenty-three men, with three times as many women and children. With the aid of an interpreter a long talk was had with the chiefs of the band, who expressed their "utter astonishment" at the visitation from so large a body of armed men the day before, saying that if attacked they "should fold their hands and unresistingly be shot down." They ridiculed the idea of so small a band of warriors rising in insurrection in the midst of thousands of white men; they had no other home than this small piece of land and here they wished to live in peace until gathered to their fathers.

Such sentiments were highly encouraging to the committee, which now proceeded to inquire into the origin of the report of hostilities. It found the whole matter had grown out of a quarrel between a German settler, named Dagen, and a drunken Indian. The German had threatened to shoot one of the red men's ponies, and about two weeks before the panic one of them had been shot, by Dagen as the Indians believed. On Sunday, August 25, one of the Indians, in a partially-intoxicated condition, accused Dagen of the shooting and "chased him around a stump, but did not draw his knife from his girdle." Dagen appealed to his neighbors to watch his house and stacks for fear they would

be burned, and thus the rumor spread, "and grew as it traveled until it became truly alarming." The report of the committee took occasion to condemn in strongest terms the conduct of those whites who were in the habit of selling liquor to the Indians, "and especially those who, visiting their camps, take the opportunity of insulting their females"; it concluded by gravely expressing the belief "that the lives and property of whites in the vicinity are safe."

Notwithstanding its slight foundation, the scare of 1861 was not confined to Horicon or even to the limits of Dodge County. Many of the neighboring towns, on receipt of the news of hostilities at Horicon, excitedly prepared to rush armed men to the scene. At Beaver Dam dispatches were received by the mayor that fifteen hundred Indians were at Horicon. A man rode through the countryside at full speed warning the farmers to flee for their lives, and many set out with their families for town, some with beds and blankets on which to pass the night.¹² "Determined men" set out for Horicon, armed with a motley array of weapons,—guns, pistols, corncutters, and pitchforks—but en route it was learned that the report of hostilities was false, and the men returned to their homes.

At West Bend, in Washington County, the news from Horicon produced a night of terror.¹³ The excitement began in the afternoon on receipt of the first report of an impending Indian descent upon Horicon. It became more general when at about seven o'clock the evening Milwaukee paper arrived confirming the news of the outbreak. Nothing of importance transpired, however, until ten o'clock, when a messenger came in from the Dekorra Road, some ten miles west, with the information that a large body of Indians was descending upon West Bend. This news, according to the contemporary scribe, "capt the climax." To the wild firing of guns and the roll of drums in the streets people

¹² Beaver Dam *Argus*, Aug. 30, 1861.

¹³ West Bend *Post*, Aug. 31, 1861.

sprang from their beds. "Children were crying and men and women were seen running in all directions. Speeches were made advising the men to stand by their homes and their families till the last. Picket guards were immediately formed and sent out in every direction, armed with rifles, shotguns, pistols, pitchforks, or whatever could be got hold of." The gunsmith was kept at work all night repairing ancient muskets and pistols. Some of the women packed their silverware, while others, still more prudent, advised their husbands to make their wills. One woman who had been bedridden for over a year and who lived half a mile out from town was hastily dumped into a wheelbarrow and trundled into the village for safety. Mounted men went out at half-hourly intervals to visit the pickets and returned reporting all well until two o'clock A. M. Then a man was reported shot, but it was finally ascertained that he was "shot in the neck with sidearms which he carried." At Barton, a short distance north of West Bend, one man stood picket all night armed with an ax and clad only in a shirt, not daring to leave his post long enough to dress.

At Fox Lake a similar state of excitement prevailed on receipt of the news from Horicon. The townsmen hastily armed, and about two hundred were leaving for the scene of battle when another dispatch from Horicon brought word that no help was needed there.¹⁴ Even at distant Galesville, almost across the state from Horicon, the fear inspired in a "Dutchman's" breast by one intoxicated Indian sufficed to produce a full-blown panic. When the report of trouble at Horicon reached town the citizens suddenly recalled that Indians had been there buying powder and lead, and the story gained credence that Galesville was to be burned and its population massacred.¹⁵ Guns were collected and cleaned, pitchforks, corn knives, and fish spears were brought out and placed in the hands of an extempore

¹⁴ *Fox Lake Gazette*, Aug. 29, 1861.

¹⁵ *La Crosse Democrat*, Sept. 6, 1861.

Home Guard. For bullets old type from the printing office, tea lead, and masons' plummets were melted. In response to the story that two hundred Indians were to attack Galesville in the night, patrols were kept up until daylight. The state of panic prevailed until the receipt of a telegram that Horicon was safe and the massacre story a humbug.

The ridiculous spectacle afforded by the Horicon scare, news of which was blazoned far and wide in the press of the state, might well have fortified the public mind against an early repetition of this particular species of folly, but no such consequence followed. News of the Sioux massacres in Minnesota in August, 1862, sent a wave of horror over the Northwest. In Minnesota it was feared for a short time that the Chippewa, who like the Sioux had a grievance against their agent, would make common cause with their ancient enemies against the whites. This fear extended to the white population of north and northwest Wisconsin, although the sequel showed that the alarm, in this state at least, was entirely without foundation.

Governor Salomon moved with vigor to the relief of the anxious settlers. He dispatched to the several points from which reports of danger came all the arms at his disposal and appealed to the War Department at Washington. "Appeals are daily made to me," he telegraphed Stanton on September 2, "for arms and ammunition. Families are leaving their homes for fear of the wandering bands. I am well satisfied that these Indians have been tampered with by rebel agents. The people must be protected. Prevention is better than cure. I have furnished to different localities all the state arms, some eight hundred that we have, and must send more. More arms must be furnished immediately, as only about 8,000 stand have been sent here, and we have full 13,000 men assigned to new regiments formed and forming" His appeals produced little

effect upon Secretary Stanton, however, who sternly rebuked the governor for his "imperious orders" to the War Department.¹⁶ Supplies of ammunition were forwarded to Wisconsin, however, and somewhat belatedly Major General Pope, fresh from his conflicts with Lee and Jackson in Virginia, was sent into the Northwest to assume command of the entire situation. Meanwhile Governor Salomon had procured the recall from Kentucky of Maurice Samuel, now a captain in the First Wisconsin Infantry, and sent him into the Chippewa country to allay the apprehensions of the people and exert what influence he might for the preservation of peace. From St. Croix Falls on August 30 Samuel reported to the governor that much apprehension existed in the counties of Dunn, Pepin, Pierce, and St. Croix, and in some of the towns midnight alarms had occurred, with the people rushing from their beds and houses in fear of imminent massacre. Notwithstanding this excitement, Samuel could learn of no depredation committed or threats made by the Chippewa. He had met A-que-en-zee, a war chief of the tribe, who had manifested only the most pacific intentions toward the whites. On the following day, August 31, Captain Harriman reported from Hudson upon measures he had taken to allay the panic in that vicinity. "So far as I can judge," he wrote, "the fear is mutual, and the Indians and Whites are striving to outdo each other in conceding Territory—i.e. while the whites are running in one direction the Indians are running in the other."

Samuel, at the request of A-que-en-zee and in pursuance of his commission from the governor, proceeded to Superior to bring his influence to bear upon the Chippewa of that vicinity. Before his arrival the inhabitants had indulged in a severe panic, the course of which was more prolonged than at any other place in Wisconsin.¹⁷ A committee of

¹⁶ Stanton to Governor Salomon, Sept. 5, 1862, ms. in governor's correspondence.

¹⁷ The story is conveniently summarized in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, III, 474-77.

PUBLIC ORDER No. 1.

SUPERIOR, AUGUST 31, 1862.

The Undersigned Committee of Safety, by virtue of the power in them vested, issue the following Orders :

1st. There will be a regularly organized Guard detailed each day, who will go on duty at 9 o'clock each evening, and remain on, until 5 o'clock the following morning, which Guard will act under the orders of an officer to be appointed by the Committee of Safety. To the furtherance of this regulation, every male person residing within the limits of the Town, between the ages of 18 and 60 years, will be called upon in their turn to stand guard, and if not able to perform the service personally, they will be required to furnish a substitute.

2d. All families are required to sleep each night, within the following prescribed limits, namely :

**Between St. Johns and Thompson Avenues,
and Fourth Street and the Bay.**

3d. All venders of ammunition, are prohibited selling or disposing of the same to any INDIAN, under penalty of CONFISCATION and having their places of business Closed.

4th. Any Indian or Squaw who may be found in a state of intoxication will be taken into custody and made to disclose from whom they obtained such Intoxicating Liquor.

5th. Any person who shall sell or give Liquor to any Indian or Squaw, will be arrested; his stock taken possession of, and a guard placed over his or her premises, until a proper disposition of the same, shall be determined upon.

WASHINGTON ASHTON,
THOS. H. HOGAN,
R. G. COBURN,

Committee of Safety.

THE COMMITTEE Suggest to the Inhabitants of the neighboring towns, the propriety of concentrating at this point, until all danger has passed.

public safety was organized which, on August 31, issued Public Order No. 1: Every male inhabitant between the ages of eighteen and sixty was required to take his turn at guard duty; the town was to be patrolled nightly from nine o'clock until five in the morning; all families were required to sleep within certain limits designated in the order; and venders of ammunition and whisky to the Indians were threatened with punishment. Notwithstanding these measures, so great was the panic that on September 3 some thirty people departed on the steamer *Neptune* and others were prevented from going only because of absence of transportation. "Why not have a battery of artillery stationed here," wrote James Ritchie, draft commissioner, to the governor on September 4, "there are *Empty* houses enough to accommodate several Regiments."

In January, 1862, Ritchie had procured the enrollment of a company of men at Superior known as the Douglas County Home Guards. On September 18 the Committee of Public Safety directed every able-bodied man to enroll in this company for service until relieved by United States soldiers. An inventory taken by the committee disclosed the presence of sixty firearms of all sorts in the town, and one of the members, E. C. Clark, was dispatched to Madison with an appeal for government arms and troops. Both were supplied, although it was not until early November that the soldiers reached Superior. Meanwhile the Douglas County Home Guards had continued to play the rôle of protector to the anxious community. Early in November Judge McCloud of Bayfield visited General Pope at St. Paul to acquaint him with the danger the home community was still believed to be in from the Chippewa. In its initial stage the panic at Superior was similar to that which at the beginning of September spread over a large portion of the state, but it is evident from its long continuance that the anxiety of the people of this section had a different basis

than did the wholly causeless and foolish temporary panic of early September in central and eastern Wisconsin.

Beginning in Western Wisconsin in the last days of August, the panic wave rolled eastward until its climax was reached in the section immediately north and west of Milwaukee on September 3 and 4. Captain Samuel on August 30 reported from St. Croix Falls a general state of fear throughout Dunn, Pepin, St. Croix, and Pierce counties, with people in many towns rushing from their beds and houses "imagining the bloody scenes of the Pioneer days of old to be upon them and a savage foe about to deprive them of life or home." From Hudson, August 31, Captain Harriman reported the white men and Indians as equally scared, with each in mortal fear of the other. At Prescott an editorial notice in the *Journal* of August 27 ridiculed the idea of any danger from Indians to the people of Pierce County. Notwithstanding, the panic ran its course, and the *Journal* of September 3 announced that "the ridiculous Indian excitement in this county" was over. The chief incident in this county was the stampede of the people of Beldenville to River Falls "while not an Indian was within fifty miles." "It was a ridiculous sight," wrote a sarcastic correspondent of the *Journal*, "to see Beldenville marshal its forces and march to the River Falls stronghold. The forces consisted of ox teams laden with stoves, pots, kettles, pork, potatoes, women and children too numerous to mention, trunks, bundles of bed clothes, and three men, and Beldenville is a deserted city. Yes, Beldenville the great has fallen."

From the Menomonie *Dunn County Lumberman* of September 6 we get a clear picture of the panic in that vicinity. For ten days past the people of the county had been intensely excited over the Indian situation. On receipt of news of the Minnesota massacre the people had promptly organized companies of Home Guards for the purpose of

defense, but singularly enough, coincident with these defensive measures the terror of the people increased, and soon "the whole population of the county were in commotion and on the move, flying from approaching savages." For four days, beginning August 29, "a constant stream of men, women and children" poured into Menomonie, all fully convinced that the Indians were close behind them murdering every white person they could overtake and devastating the settlements as they progressed. In most cases the fugitives had left everything behind in their mad race to keep ahead of the imaginary pursuers. Some, however, had loaded their wagons with bedding and provisions; others destroyed the property they were unable to carry away. One man threw a quantity of flour into the river to prevent the Indians getting it; he then bestowed some other loose property upon a neighbor who had concluded not to run away, and embarked in a boat down the Red Cedar bound for "Pennsylvania."

Whole settlements were evacuated. The entire Norwegian settlement "fled in the greatest consternation." The Mud Creek settlers scattered in several directions, some to Menomonie, some to the southward, while others took to the cornfields. The panic struck the Masee settlement on Sunday, August 31.¹⁸ Church services had been held as usual, when those living east of the schoolhouse were met by someone with the report that the Indians were coming, and for them to give the alarm. Two men immediately started on horseback to spread the alarm, and a mad rush ensued for Downsville. "When we arrived there," relates a participant, "it seemed as though everybody in that vicinity was there, some had their household goods, but each had some sort of a weapon of defense, all the guns, axes, pitchforks, and scythes were there." The question now arose as to what next should be done. It was finally

¹⁸ For this account, in addition to the *Dunn County Lumberman* of Sept. 6, 1862, I have drawn upon a paper read by J. C. Ticknor at the Old Settlers' meeting, Oct. 18, 1913.

agreed, before proceeding farther, to send out a reconnoitering party of armed men to discover the facts of the situation. This party, caught in a heavy rainstorm, camped for the night in a barn by the roadside. While waiting for the scouts to report, some of the fugitives at Downsville began building rafts to descend the river to Durand, while others started in wagons for that place. In the midst of these preparations the thunderstorm which detained the scouts broke, and many declared the thunder to be the report of cannon at Menomonie.

The panic in this vicinity subsided almost as rapidly as it had arisen. At Downsville the discomfort produced by the thunderstorm, which thoroughly drenched the fugitives, combined with an absence of sleeping accommodations to bring about the beginnings of a state of sanity, and by the following night most of them were back in their homes. In general this was the story everywhere. As soon as people began to think, they realized the foolishness of their fears and made haste to return to their abandoned homes. The example of the press was helpful in quieting the excitement, as the editors, almost without exception, ridiculed the idea of danger and counseled their readers to remain calm. At Sparta the *Herald* of September 3 urged that no real cause for alarm existed in Monroe and adjoining counties. If the natives had ever contemplated hostilities, the idea was abandoned ere now, since they knew the whites were prepared for an attack. Here, as at most places in western Wisconsin, a Home Guard had been organized with over one hundred members. Curiously enough, while the excitement was subsiding in some communities it was rising in others. At La Crosse it was reported on September 7 that the Lewis Valley settlement had been burned by Indians.¹⁹ This news was brought, characteristically enough, not by a resident of Lewis Valley but by a

¹⁹ La Crosse *Weekly Democrat*, Sept. 8, 1862.

man from Salem. In Lewis Valley the people were being told of the destruction of the Bostwick Valley and Mormon Coulee settlements, while the Black River Falls *Banner* conveyed the information to friends at La Crosse, Sparta, and elsewhere, that the horrible tales they had heard of massacre at Black River Falls were all untrue. "This is a great country for people to believe all they hear," dryly commented the editor of the *Democrat*. Yet even as he wrote, scores of people from the adjacent section of Minnesota were pouring into La Crosse. None of them had seen any Indians, but "their neighbors" had seen many. The editor did not believe there was an Indian within seventy-five miles of La Crosse, but in the popular excitement "every bush has an Indian behind it, every moan of the wind is an Indian signal, the hoot of the owl is nothing but the infuriated whoop of an army of savages." The *Democrat* granted there might be some cause for alarm, but there was none for a general stampede. A heavy force of armed men was between the Indians and the settlers, and the chief desideratum now was confidence. Home Guards should be organized, and those who spread lying reports should be promptly tarred and feathered and hanged.

It is as impracticable as it is unnecessary to describe all the scenes of panic in this section of the state, but it may be worth while to present the clear, albeit ungrammatical, statement made on behalf of the inhabitants of the village of Wilton concerning their reasons for fearing the red men. At a meeting held September 6 it was decided to organize a military company for home defense, and a "corresponding committee" appealed to the governor for authority and instructions to this end. "We have not taken this step," the committee wrote, "from feers of an amediate attact from the savages now roving in our midst. But from observations that have been made, and from facts that have been and are being brought to light, are of that

carictor, seemingly that would convince any thoughtful man that there is a porful effort being made on the part of individuals from some quarters, as belonging to some class of vile traitor to our noble government, to afect a younion of all the diferent tribes of wild Aborigines of our States and Teritories to attact our fronttier, and thus aid on the work of the desstruction of our noble government. Among the many evidences whitch we have of this fact are the following—White men have been discovered in the ranks of the savages, disguised as warriers, the Indians have strangely of late come in posesion of formidable arms and emmunition. Tribes that have long been engaged in war, and untill laitley entertained the most dedly enmity to each other, are seen mingling together in warlike companies, and seem deeply agitated upon some topic and the ungarded language and haughty demeanor of some that rove in our midst clearly show that the tribes even in our midst are but watting for the consumation of some great plan, preparitory to a fierful blow upon our ungarded frontier. If these things be so, and none in our midst have confidence to say that they are not so, is it eny thing strange that we as lowial citizens of this staite and dwelling upon our vary frontier exposed to these savages, if such an attact should be made, should feel a deep anxiety to plaise ourselves in the best attitude of defience.”

The committee’s statement of its “evidence” was made, it is to be noted, after the immediate panic had subsided in this particular community; yet it reveals clearly the state of mind which was responsible for that outburst of emotional unreason. Given a quantity of gasoline, it requires but the application of a match to produce an explosion; the match taken by itself would be harmless. In the outbreak we are studying the abnormal state of the public mind supplied the gasoline; the application of some report of Indian outrage, however improbable or foolish it might be in itself, produced the panic.

The panic in central Wisconsin, in the region centering about Stevens Point, seems to have taken place quite as early as in the western part of the state. At Wautoma the scare was at its height as early as August 27, and by September 3 had subsided.²⁰ The local editor ridiculed the fears of his neighbors, who were organizing guards and maintaining nightly patrols when there were not fifty Indians within fifty miles and the town was surrounded on all sides by thickly settled country. As a typical instance of the silliness of the current rumors, the visit of four homeless Menomonie on a begging expedition was magnified by the time the report reached Fond du Lac into the story that four hundred warriors had burned Wautoma and massacred its citizens. The alarm in this section of the state was promoted by widespread reports that large bodies of "strange" Indians were congregating in the region between the Black and the Wisconsin rivers.²¹ The editor of the New Lisbon *Juneau County Argus*, commenting on the local fears, expressed the belief on August 27 that there was no danger; yet he approved the organization of a Home Guard on general principles, and favored also the request made of the governor that a regiment of soldiers be stationed at New Lisbon. At this place it was popularly believed that bands of warriors amounting to as many as one thousand were congregated within twenty miles of town; on inquiry, however, the four hundred Indians reported at Tunnel dwindled to fifty; the three hundred on Big Creek proved to be the night camp of a small party on their way to attend a green corn dance above Necedah; and the four hundred near Scott and Bulkeley's mill proved to be six capable of taking the warpath, with the usual number of squaws, papooses, and dogs. On Saturday, August 30,

²⁰ Wautoma *Waushara County Argus*, Aug. 27 and Sept. 3, 1862.

²¹ See, e.g., letter of Moses Strong from Stevens Point, Aug. 30, printed in *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Sept. 2; and letter of L. S. Cohn from Wausau, Aug. 30, printed in *Berlin Courant*, Sept. 4.

Judge Miner of Necedah and a delegation of citizens visited the Indian camp fourteen miles above town, where all the red men from this section of the state were congregated. The camp contained, by actual count, seventy-two men, all of whom were as badly scared as the most timid of the whites. On being interviewed their chiefs protested they had no remote notion of hostility and said that if attacked by the whites they would lay down their arms and make no resistance.

The report which Judge Miner brought back produced some abatement of the excitement in the immediate vicinity of Necedah. It had no effect on the contemporary hysteria in other places, however. A resident of Berlin en route to Lake Superior, wrote from Wausau on August 30 an account of his observations to that date.²² At Plover the talk had been that two hundred armed and mounted Indians were coming from Grand Rapids to destroy the place. At Stevens Point the observer had found all quiet, but learned that some fifty Indians had been there a week or two earlier and had left for Waupaca on a begging expedition. Arriving at Wausau August 30, the traveler found that a Home Guard had been organized and was patrolling the town at night. The previous night a report of fifty Indians descending the river had created great excitement, and women ran through the streets crying, "My children, my children." Investigation revealed that the party consisted of a single Indian who was out on a night fishing trip.

At Grand Rapids the scare ran its course somewhat earlier, apparently, than at most adjoining points. For two months rumors of prospective Indian depredations were in circulation.²³ It was reported that bands of warriors numbering from one to eight hundred and belonging to various tribes were stealthily camping in the vicinity. At length the gathering excitement culminated in a panic

²² Letter of L. S. Cohn in *Berlin Courant*, Sept. 4, 1862.

²³ Grand Rapids *Wood County Reporter*, Sept. 13, 1862.

outburst on the night of August 22. A citizen saw what he took to be a mounted Indian, who on being accosted disappeared in the gathering darkness. The alarm was given, and by sending messengers to all occupied houses, within two hours the entire population was raised, armed with every conceivable weapon of defense. Lights were ordered to be left burning while the crowd assembled in a hall to organize for defense against the anticipated attack. It was now reported that two townsmen who had gone out to make a reconnoissance had come upon two Indians in Centralia, and a spasm of renewed alarm ensued. However, the night wore away without any attack and the advent of dawn brought "joy and peace" to the anxious watchers. On the following evening the citizens again assembled, this time to organize a Home Guard. Officers were chosen, some thirty pickets were stationed to guard the town, and a petition was dispatched by messenger to the governor appealing for a supply of arms. Excitement ran high for three days, when it was discovered that the two "Indians" who had been seen in Centralia were in fact two white men out on a reconnoissance of their own. With no new cause for alarm, the terror subsided and the volunteer guard disbanded, despite the efforts of the officers to hold it together. A few days later two Indians actually did enter Grand Rapids in the broad light of day. They were chiefs, come as spokesmen of their band to enter into a treaty with the whites, or take any other action they might to avert the impending attack which they feared was about to be made upon them. The panic of the whites had induced a similar but far more reasonable panic among the red men themselves.

It remained for the group of lake-shore counties extending from Milwaukee to Green Bay and westward as far as Lake Winnebago to put the climax to this reign of hysteria on September 3 and 4. Suddenly, as if by spontaneous

combustion, over all this populous region the inhabitants were seized with the idea that destroying hordes were upon them, and bereft of all sense or reason they sought safety in headlong flight.

At Chilton on September 3 word came that Centerville in Manitowoc County had been destroyed.²⁴ Three thousand Indians were advancing on New Holstein and five hundred more were murdering the residents of Holland in Brown County. The residents of New Holstein started en masse for Fond du Lac; those of Woodville sought refuge at Stockbridge or Clifton; while the inhabitants of Rantoul, Brillion, and other points fled for Chilton. Here pickets were stationed on every avenue leading into the city, and the streets were patrolled nearly all night. Then a deliverer appeared in the person of Judge Pierpont, a level-headed resident of Manitowoc. He went among the people showing them the absurdity of their fright; by morning the panic had subsided, and those who had succumbed to it began to feel ashamed over the figure they had cut.

For several days reports from the north had come into Fond du Lac of another "Horicon War," without exciting attention, when in the evening of September 3 a stream of fugitive families from Chilton and Calumet began pouring into the city.²⁵ Manitowoc was in ashes, Sheboygan was plundered and burning, and the red devils were thundering on to Greenbush and Chilton—such was the exciting character of the tale the fugitives told. That night a picket guard was put out to the north of the city, "armed with revolvers they didn't know how to shoot, and pistols they couldn't cock." On Thursday, the fourth, little occurred until noon, when a fresh stream of fugitives began pouring in, this time from the southeast, with reports of the destruction of Sheboygan, Plymouth, Greenbush, Manitowoc, and Wacousta. The town was now thoroughly

²⁴ Chilton *Times*, Sept. 6, 1862.

²⁵ Fond du Lac *Saturday Reporter*, Sept. 6, 1862.

aroused, and great crowds gathered in the streets to discuss the situation pro and con. In a short time parties of men were sent out to investigate the truth of the reports. "On every road," wrote the local editor, who accompanied one of these parties, "we could see dozens of wagons all loaded down with women and children fleeing towards the city—no men were along—all had been left at home to fight. Everywhere on the road we saw empty houses, flying families, and numerous picket-guards facing towards the south-east, armed with old shotguns and awaiting the first attack. . . . Every family met was asked if they had seen the Indians—and sure enough in that whole trip of fourteen miles not a person could be found that had seen an Indian, though all were satisfied that the said Indians were but a short distance behind them. And so the various parties sent out returned without finding a trace of an Indian, and seeing nothing but a deserted country." Our editor speaks highly of the bravery of the men, but in the press of other cities the saving of Fond du Lac from destruction was facetiously credited to an aged female tollgate keeper. When the war party appeared the braves had no money to pay toll with and she dutifully refused them permission to pass.

The scare at Appleton was precipitated by a report received on Wednesday afternoon, September 3, that the Indians were burning and massacring in the town of Morris-town, and "marching on in their butchery."²⁶ The night was bright with moonlight; the people gathered in the streets, and three scouts were sent out to learn the facts. Meanwhile fugitives began to arrive, and the stories they told grew with every repetition. Some of the townsmen packed their valuables and wanted the train got out for Oshkosh; others favored sending for the soldiers at Oshkosh to come to Appleton. Eventually all went to bed. At noon the next day the scouts returned; they reported that a group

²⁶ Appleton *Crescent*, Sept. 6, 1862.

of hungry Indians near Manitowoc River had slaughtered an ox and roasted it; also that the whole country was panic-stricken. Numbers traveled all night fleeing towards Fond du Lac, Oshkosh, Neenah, Green Bay, and other places. So rattled were the Appletonians that in the opinion of the local editor half a dozen Indians could have taken peaceable possession of the city.

At Plymouth, Manitowoc, Sheboygan, Port Washington, Waukesha, Richfield, and apparently everywhere throughout the section of the state we are discussing, scenes similar to those already described were enacted. For the sake of brevity we content ourselves with presenting merely representative details concerning them.

At Manitowoc the excitement began on the evening of Tuesday, the second, when fugitives from Branch, a point seven miles northwest, reported that the Indians were but three miles behind, slaughtering and burning.²⁷ A guard was hastily formed and the streets entering town were patrolled. The story from Branch proved a humbug, but fresh reports fed the excitement. The valiant women of the town are said to have gathered in the upper stories of the courthouse equipped with vessels of boiling water to be used in scalding the on-coming hordes. A male settler, less valiant, hid himself in a featherbed; while some found comfort in the reflection that if worst came to worst they could embark upon the vessels in the harbor and find refuge on the bosom of Lake Michigan. It was stated that over a thousand fugitives rushed into the city and that five hundred men were under arms during the night of September 3.

A pioneer resident of Plymouth, Mrs. H. N. Smith, has left a lively and somewhat satirical account of the panic at that place, written some ten years after the event.²⁸ The

²⁷ *Manitowoc Pilot*, Sept. 5, 1862; letter of R. G. Plumb (ms.) Jan. 5, 1918; correspondence from Manitowoc dated Sept. 4, in *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Sept. 10, 1862.

²⁸ This is one of a series of articles on the history of Plymouth, printed in the *Plymouth Reporter* beginning Dec. 10, 1872. See also report from Plymouth in *Sheboygan Evergreen City Times*, Sept. 6, 1862.

calm peace of the early September day was suddenly broken by a solitary horseman riding headlong into town with the "blood-freezing" news that Manitowoc, Two Rivers, Chilton, and Franklin had been sacked and their citizens slain by a band of red men at whose hands Plymouth would shortly meet a similar fate. The skepticism of such as were inclined to doubt this first report was soon dispelled by the arrival of another horseman with a story still more thrilling. "The afternoon sun was already far in the west when the very air seemed to tremble with the quaking panic. As twilight approached there was a rush of hundreds of wagons. . . . The men were armed with scythes, sickles, butcher-knives, corn-cutters, screw-drivers, and every species of firearms possible to be procured. On they came, load after load, till not only the taverns but the private houses and even the little depot swarmed with unexpected guests. . . ." A council of war disclosed the presence of a considerable number of firearms, but only three pounds of powder in town, the property of Delos Gates. This, Mrs. Gates prudently secured in her apron and refused to part with "for love or money." A citizen bravely offered to go to Sheboygan for powder, and while the crowd and excitement continued to wax, three others volunteered to go out to the north and investigate the truth of the reports. They encountered plenty of people "flying before a fancied foe," but no Indians. At Sinz's tavern in the town of Rhine were found "hundreds of women and children, with three or four men." At Flagg's tavern twelve miles north of Plymouth, two hundred men had assembled under the leadership of the Honorable Julius Wolf, "who, armed cap-a-pie with the uniform of Prussia, a la Kaiser Wilhelm, with gun, sword, bayonet, pistols, was an object well calculated not only to strike terror to the savage heart but also to restore confidence to the most timid and to cure dyspepsia in its worst form." But as usual no one could be found who had himself seen an

Indian, and the scouting party returned, "satisfied that there was not a redskin enemy between Plymouth and Lake Superior."

The excitement over, the absurdities of the situation began to receive attention. One man took the pork out of his barrels and buried it in the cellar. Another, who had a cask of currant wine, called in his neighbors to help him drink it up, "determined that the savages should not get drunk through any fault of his." A woman ran three miles to town with a pumpkin pie in her hand. Another woman turned her pigs into the garden, reasoning that the vegetables would benefit her no longer and the animals might enjoy one good meal before the redskins arrived. One family scattered its furniture over a "ten acre lot," hoping thereby to save at least some of it.

The panic at Sheboygan began as at Plymouth when on September 3 a frantic horseman dashed into town with the usual tale of Indian horrors.²⁹ Fifty red devils were burning Centerville, twelve miles north and every man who could carry a gun or a pitchfork was frantically desired to rush to the rescue. Soon another courier arrived with the report that three hundred Indians were sacking Herman; while a third brought word that five hundred were advancing on Sheboygan itself. Close on the heels of the couriers came a rush of fugitives, and the town was thrown into an uproar. By nightfall it was estimated that the number of fugitives in town was upwards of four thousand. A single drawbridge spanned the river, and this the prudent city fathers had taken up to prevent the Indians entering the town. It likewise cut off from their haven of refuge the remainder of the stream of fugitives who were still pouring in.³⁰ With greater rationality, perhaps, the authori-

²⁹ A really artistic narration of the scare at Sheboygan is given in the *Evergreen City Times* of Sept. 6 under the heading "The Gunpowder Plot." It humorously represents the entire affair as devised by a "powder huckster" to create a market for a stock of unsalable powder which he had on his hands.

³⁰ The drawbridge story is given by Mrs. Smith in her narrative of the scare at Plymouth. It is also affirmed by Frances Meyer, assistant librarian of Sheboygan (letter

ties sent out messengers to Centerville to report upon the situation there. By evening they returned with the comforting information that no trace of Indians or of Indian depredations could be discovered.³¹

All Ozaukee was gripped by the panic, and Port Washington, Waukesha, and even Milwaukee became the rendezvous of streams of terror-stricken fugitives. To Governor Salomon, who chanced to be in Milwaukee, came appeals for help from Richfield, Waukesha, and other points. A company of Milwaukee militia took the field in response to the report of the burning of Cedarburg, but its campaign into Ozaukee County proved wholly bloodless. The northward advance of the soldiers was rendered difficult by the stream of vehicles encountered, all heading for Milwaukee. A resident of Wauwatosa, about five or six miles out of the city on the Lisbon plank road, reported that three or four hundred teams passed during the afternoon and night of the fourth.³² All night long the vehicles went by in the mud and rain, following one another so closely that the stoppage of one quickly blocked the road in the rear. The correspondent sought to stop some of the fugitives, but in vain. But one man, he reported, had seen any Indians; he claimed to have seen three or four thousand, but refused to pause long enough to answer any further questions.

To recount further details of the flight of the settlers to Milwaukee would be but to repeat the stories already told of the scenes enacted in other places. "The human family is at times ridiculous or frightened or desperate or foolish or cowardly," observes one historian of Milwaukee, "but never until the Indian scare of 1862 were the dwellers of Milwaukee and Wisconsin possessed of all five of these attributes at once." To one who, like the present writer, has gone

of Jan. 10, 1918) on the authority of her grandfather, still living, who was night watchman at Sheboygan at the time of the panic.

³¹ Dispatches from Sheboygan in the *Milwaukee Daily Wisconsin*, Sept. 5, 1862.

³² *Milwaukee Daily Wisconsin*, Sept. 5, 1862.

through, in the newspapers of the time and elsewhere, the mass of evidence concerning the panic of 1862 in Wisconsin this caustic comment seems to err, if at all, in the direction of understatement.³³

³³ I am indebted to Mr. Frederick Merk of Harvard University for placing at my disposal much of the data on which this article is based. Mr. Merk had himself intended to make the study but unforeseen exigencies prevented him from carrying out the project.